

# David Atlee Phillips, writer-spy

David Atlee Phillips, 65, a former CIA officer who left the agency to go public in defense of spying, died of lung cancer yesterday at his home in Bethesda.

The spy, he contended, was "the only person in the United States who didn't have a constituency."

Mr. Phillips retired from the Central Intelligence Agency in 1975. The next year, he published "The Night Watch," a still-popular memoir of 25 years under cover.

He took to the lecture tour, also, with the message that because spying is necessary, it is therefore honorable. One of five books he published was meant specifically for young people seeking intelligence careers.

He prized the fact, he told *The Washington Times* in March, that many students who heard his campus lectures went on to work for the CIA — despite their teachers.

A president's role, Mr. Phillips said he believed, is to deploy covert operatives sparingly, with full congressional oversight. He long advocated that the CIA's clandestine branch be shrunk to 100 trained professionals — to preserve secrecy and accountability to Congress — and removed from the agency.

Last January, Director William Webster awarded him the rarely

bestowed CIA Seal Medal, the highest honor the agency can give a non-employee.

Mr. Phillips was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and attended William and Mary College. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps during World War II and served as a nose gunner in a B-24 bomber. Shot down over Austria in 1944, Mr. Phillips was held in a prisoner-of-war camp. He escaped and returned to allied lines after 16 days of hiding. He was awarded the Purple Heart and the Air Medal.

An actor before the war, Mr. Phillips moved to Chile in July 1948 and purchased the English-language daily newspaper the *South Pacific Mail*.

Mr. Phillips was recruited by the CIA in 1950 and moved to Guatemala, where he took part in the 1954 overthrow of leftist dictator Jacobo Arbenz.

He next worked undercover in Havana and briefly undercover in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1957. During 1960 and 1961, Mr. Phillips was in charge of a clandestine radio station on Swan Island, near Cuba.

In 1965, Mr. Phillips became a CIA officer, as opposed to an agent, in Mexico City. He worked as station chief in the Dominican Republic during the civil war and helped force Gen. Elias Wessin y Wessin to leave



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the country as part of the U.S.-imposed truce.

Mr. Phillips also served as CIA station chief in Brazil and Venezuela and became the agency's chief of Western Hemisphere operations from 1973 until 1975.

A month after he left the agency, the Association of Former Intelligence Officers was organized by a handful of officers in the living room of his home. Today, AFIO has 20 chapters around the country.

In addition to the Seal Medal, Mr. Phillips received the Distinguished Intelligence Medal and the Intelligence Medal of Merit.

He is survived by his second wife, Virginia Phillips; three daughters, Maria Ligiero of Brazil, Debra Phillips of Bethesda and Winne Phillips of San Francisco; and four sons, David A. Phillips Jr. of Santa Fe, N.M., Christopher Phillips of Bethesda, Bryan Phillips of Virginia Beach, and Todd Phillips of Bethesda.